

SOME
OBSERVATIONS
Concerning the
CHURCH
OF
CHRIST.

By WILLIAM CUDWORTH.



L O N D O N :

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TO THE READER.

THE Lord, in his providence, having call'd me and some Brethren to unite together, in order to Church-Communion and Fellowship, is the reason of my printing these Observations, that so our sentiments, in respect of the Church of Christ and its Government, may be made known, as our Doctrine (being mostly Lutheran) is already, in the * Books that have been publish'd; for being determin'd that the Word of GOD shall be our standard in Doctrine and Discipline, we are willing, by manifestation of the truth, to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of GOD.

W. CUDWORTH.

* Three Sermons written by Mr. John Sympson, entitled,
I. *Man's Righteousness no Cause or Part of his Justification.*
II. *Salvation only by God's Grace.* III. *Salvation only by Believing.*—Also, *Abraham's Steps of Faith,* by Mr. John Eaton.—*Justification by Christ alone,* by Mr. Samuel Richardson.—*Some Reasons against making Use of Marks and Evidences, &c.* by Mr. William Cudworth.—*A Dialogue between a Preacher of God's Righteousness, and a Preacher of Inherent Righteousness,* by Mr. William Cudworth.

Some OBSERVATIONS concerning the CHURCH of CHRIST.

Ob. 1. **T**HAT there is one holy catholick church, called in scripture, the general assembly of the first-born, *Heb. xii. 23.* the whole family in heaven and earth, *Eph. iii. 15.* which family or Church are in one body and one spirit, and are called in one hope of their calling, they have one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all, *Eph. iii. 4, 5, 6.*

2. This Church is God's workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus, and are spiritually begotten with the word of truth, and born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, even that word which by the gospel is preached unto you, *Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23, 25.*

3. This Church being born and preserved of the Spirit and word of truth, is not confined to persons or places, *John iv. 21, 23.* and no part of it is visible, but only so far as the word of truth and sacraments are received in any place or places, otherwise it is entirely invisible, *2 Tim. ii. 19. Rom. ii. 28, 29.*

4. This Church is also God's care, Jesus Christ himself being the only head thereof; and often, when to all appearance, it has been almost decayed and ruined, and the stated labourers have departed from the truth, he has raised him up pastors after his own heart, to set his people free, and the truth of the gospel has ever been retrieved and maintained by his peoples being raised up, and seperating from their corrupt Churches; and thus has the true Church been preserv'd and recover'd, from

time to time by such godly separations. Come out from among them, and be ye sepearte, *Cor. vi. 17.* let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them, *Jer. xv. 19.* So *Luther* separated from the Church of *Rome*, and others, &c.

5. Every one that truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, is to be esteemed a real member of this holy catholick Church, whether he is joined to any particular body or no; nevertheless it is right not to forsake the assembling ourselves together as the manner of some is, *Heb. x. 5.*

6. A visible Church is described in the 19th article of the Church of *England*, as follows: "A Church is a congregation of faithful men, where the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administred according to God's holy ordinances;" or according to *Luther's* catechism, wherein the word of God is sincerely and purely preach'd, and where the people also holily as the children of God, live according to it; and by the Apostle *Paul*, *1 Cor. i. 2.* it is described to be them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.

7. An assembly of such united together, by mutual consent, *Amos iii. 3.* are constantly called in scripture, a Church, insomuch that in the *New Testament*, the word Church means nothing else, except in some places, where it speaks of the universal Church afore described.——

And our Saviour, to give encouragement to such assemblies, has told us, *Mat. xviii. 20.* that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them; if then there were 1000 such assemblies, they are according to the constant tenour of God's word 1000 Churches of Christ, and stand in need of no other authority to constitute them so, neither is there any particular visible body of people, who from the word of God may be called the Church, rather than another particular body professing the true faith.

8. Some think that such particular Churches, unless they were all govern'd by one particular body, cannot be truly united. This arises from a mistake of the true scriptural union, which is no where described as consisting in being under any head, save Jesus Christ alone,

nor

nor in being govern'd by any one particular body; but it is a unity of the Spirit, a unity of the faith in the bond of peace and love, *Eph. iv. 2, 3, 4*; and the endeavouring after, and placing the unity of the Church in other things, has ever been hurtful to the true union.

9. Many different assemblies cannot conveniently have any other union than that of faith and love, unless either one Church have dominion over the other; or the ministers have dominion over the Churches, both which want scripture proof.

1. For as to the first, it cannot be proved from scripture, that the Churches establish'd by the Apostles were subject to any particular body, or were required to own any other head, but Jesus Christ; but, on the contrary, *Rev. i. 4. ch. ii. ch. iii.* *John* writes to the seven Churches of *Asia* distinctly, tho' they were in one country, and charges each Church, with its own guilt; and commends each Church by itself. — takes no notice of any power any had over another; — he directs his epistle to the angel or servant of the church; but the matter he speaks to the whole Church, and concludes, Hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches,

Again, the Church of *Corinth*, is said, not to be inferior to other Churches, *2 Cor. xii. 13.*

If those who are of a contrary mind would prove from scripture, that Christ ordained an universal head of his Church on earth, or that the Apostles had more than a co-ordinate power, and that this power was conveyed to any successors, they might be attended to; but till then, any other succession of ministers or Churches, than a succession in the true faith of Christ, is to be number'd among those fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith, cautioned against by the Apostle *Paul*, *1 Tim. i. 4.*

2. And as to the second, *viz.* the ministers having dominion over the Churches, it may be consider'd: That two or three or more members of Christ, gathered together in his name, are not to be lorded over by any ministers, or assembly of ministers, but are to be esteem'd of according to the dignity the Lord has been pleased to put upon them, being call'd to be saints. — The

children and heritage of God. — The purchase of his blood. — The glory of Christ. — The fulness of him who filleth all in all. — Whereas ministers are only called to be servants, and stewards to the Churches; and ought to consider themselves as such, whether they be appointed by God, or appointed by the Church, or by both. Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, *1 Cor. iv. 2.* We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake, *2 Cor. iv. 5.* And *Mat. xxiii. 6. xi. 17.* Our Saviour saith, that the scribes and pharisees love the chief seats in the synagogues, &c. but he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. — For whether is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifieth the gold. See also, *3 John 9, 10, 11.*

If that due distinction the scripture makes, *Acts xv. 1, 2, 3, 4.* between the Church and the ministers, the members of the body, and the servants to the body, was observ'd, it would clear up many things in this matter. We become saints, and members of Christ's body; the bride, the lamb's wife, by faith only in the blood of Christ, without gifts, or any sort of labouring or service; and these are what the Holy Ghost constantly calls the Church, and little companies of these joined together, are called Churches; 'tis these that are spiritual, and judge all things; 'tis these have the mind of Christ, *1 Cor. ii. 15. 16.* and have our Saviour's promise, that where two or three of them are gather'd together, there is he in the midst of them. When any one member of such a body, having gifts, are called upon to make use of them, he is to consider that these gifts are not to prefer him more than he was before, by virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ; but are given him to edification of the Church, and is not hereby to become lord over God's heritage; but tho' he is a member and a son, yet for the sake of the Church, in the exercise of his gifts, to follow the example of Christ, and to put on the form of a servant, and act according to the determination of the Church or body of believers, to whom
he

he is servant, or appointed to go before in teaching, ministering, ruling, &c.

It is the pastor's duty to feed the people with knowledge and understanding, *Jer.* iii. 15. xxiii. 3, 4. *Acts* xxviii. 17. To speak God's word unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, *Ex.* ii. 7. To watch, and give them warning from God, *Ex.* iii. 17, &c. *Acts* xx. 17. To teach the people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause men to discover between the unclean and the clean, &c. *Ex.* xlv. 23, 24. But as to any power of ruling, receiving, casting out, &c. this power the scripture has committed into the hands of the Church members, and he is to act therein, but by their consent and approbation.

The particular Churches are described in the *New Testament*, as having the privilege of chusing their own officers, and determining their own matters among themselves; and by the Church, is not meant any where an assembly of ministers, or any particular body, but the whole multitude of disciples, who are called the Church frequently, in distinction from the Apostles and Elders, &c.

The Apostles, &c. were Men extraordinary called of God, to plant the Churches; yet it is remarkable, that when by the fall of *Judas* there was one wanting among them, the eleven would not appoint a twelfth themselves, but *Peter* stood up in the midst of the disciples, &c. about one hundred and twenty, and they appointed two to be chosen for Apostles. See *Acts* i. 15, 21, 27.— And in *2 Cor.* xviii. 19. there is mention made of a brother, who was chosen of the Churches, to travel with the Apostles.

Again, *Acts* vi. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and desired them to look out among themselves deacons; and then the apostles appointed them over that business. *Acts* ii. 22, 26, the Church at *Jerusalem* appointed *Barnabas* to go as far as *Antioch*. *Acts* x. 20, 21, &c. when the dearth was prophesied of, the disciples, every man, according to his ability, determin'd to send relief unto

the brethren who dwelt in *Judea*, which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of *Barnabas* and *Saul*. *Acts* xv. 1. &c. The Church at *Antioch* determin'd that *Paul* and *Barnabas* should go up to *Jerusalem* about the dispute of circumcision. When they were come to *Jerusalem*, they were received by the Church*, and the Apostles and Elders.—Then it is said, *all the multitude* kept silence, and gave audience to *Barnabas* and *Paul*.—Then it pleased the Apostles and Elders, *with the whole Church*, to send chosen men of their own company to *Antioch*, with *Paul* and *Barnabas*,—and wrote letters by them after this manner. The Apostles, Elders, and Brethren, send greeting, unto the Brethren which are of the Gentiles, in *Antioch*, *Syria*, and *Cilicia*.—It seemed good to us, *being assembled with one accord*, to send chosen men unto you.—It seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us, &c. So when they were dismissed, they came to *Antioch*, and when they had gather'd the multitude together, they deliver'd the epistle.

The Apostle *Paul*, *2 Theff.* iii. 6, 14. doth not take upon himself to deliver to *Satan*, or excommunicate separate from the brethren, but only commands the brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that *they withdraw themselves* from every brother that walketh disorderly, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. And *1 Cor.* v. 4. *Paul* judged, or gave his vote concerning the incestuous person, that in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when they were gather'd together, and *Paul* present in spirit with them, with the power the Lord Jesus Christ had invested them with, to deliver such a one unto *Satan*. If *Paul* had power to do it himself, he need not tell them to gather together to do it: If *Paul* might withdraw from such a

* The multitude of disciples, or body of the people, are here called the Church, as in many other places, in distinction from the Apostles and Elders, &c. but there is not one place that calls the Apostles and Elders, distinct from the people, the Church.

person himself, and separate from a congregation, that would not withdraw from such persons; yet that could not tolerate him to separate that person from the rest of the congregation, any otherwise than by advising them to separate from him: For as such an assembly gather together by mutual consent, so also, they ought to separate from any one, if occasion be, by mutual consent.

From all this it appears, that the extraordinary messengers, such as the Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists, or the ordinary officers, such as pastors, teachers, &c. never assumed any other than a co-ordinate power with the rest of the members of the Churches, and that every Church had the power of ruling and governing among themselves: And this does not at all hinder, but that the faithful ministers may be esteem'd at the same time as the ambassadors of God; and they that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, *i. e.* in the first place, as being Saints themselves, and members of the body; and in the second, as faithful brethren, in having a watchful care of the members; and every one who hath gifts of any sort, and make the use of them faithfully for the good of the whole, will not lose the reward of *their* service (tho' it be but a cup of cold water) from him, who has already made over to them the reward of *the inheritance*.

10. I would further observe in the words of the confession of *Wirtemberg*, That "the ministry of remitting or retaining sins, which otherwise is call'd *The key of the kingdom of heaven*, is not given to the free power of the persons of men, but it is so nearly annex'd to the word of the gospel, that so many as do preach the gospel, may truly be said to remit and to retain sins; to wit, to remit their sins who by faith do receive the gospel, to retain theirs that do condemn the gospel. *Mark xvi. Preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" And *Chrysostom* saith, "The key is the knowledge of the scriptures, by which key the truth is open'd unto men."

Of

Of the MINISTERS.

THE Ministers which Jesus Christ hath set in his Church, are either extraordinary, as Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists, called for the planting the Churches at first; to which may be added also, those who are raised up from time to time, to recover and preserve the Church in the truth of the gospel, when it is corrupted; or else they are ordinary, such as Elders, Pastors and Teachers, whom the Churches chuse from among themselves.

Those extraordinary servants of the Church, whom the Lord raiseth up for the preservation of his truth, are seldom or never acknowledg'd by the corrupt ministry or people; but the sheep who are made free by the truth, know the shepherd's voice from a stranger's; and by these two things is a true minister of Christ to be known:

1. That he preaches not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and sets before the people nothing more than the pure word of God.

2. That those who receive the truth in the love of it, are edified thereby; for the ministers are given to edification of the body, *Eph. iv. 12.* So that as *Zanchius* saith, "we may well conclude, that by whose labour we see the Church to be edified, their calling is of Christ, and their ministry from God, and legitimate."

The ordinary Elders, Pastors, Teachers, &c. are from scripture chosen and ordain'd by the Churches, to which they are to be related as officers; for tho' the Apostles, &c. are generally describ'd as laying their hands on, and ordaining them whom the Churches chose, yet there is no mention made of any command or power given them by the Lord Jesus Christ, that they in particular, or distinct from the rest of the Church, should ordain. The Apostles method I conceive to be this, that having gather'd a company of Saints together, they told them to look out among themselves persons fit, according to such directions

as are given in *Timothy*, &c. and then they in the name and presence of the Church, ordain'd and appointed them in their offices ; and herein they acted only as a single member of the Church, personating the whole body, and not as persons having that power peculiar in themselves. This will appear still plainer, if we consider,

1. There is an exprefs command and authority given to those that teach to baptize, &c. but none to chuse and ordain ministers over the people ; whereas had it been our Saviour's will his Church should have absolutely been so govern'd, he would, no doubt, have given exprefs command in this, as he has in other things, that the ministers and people might know their proper stations, and not be burthen'd with uncertainties.

2. It is weak to think, that the Churches have power to chuse out from among themselves officers, which is the main matter ; and not have power to use any form of publickly designing and fixing them in their offices after they have chosen them.

3. Were it not so when the ministry was se'l from the truth, and become corrupted, there would be no possibility of obtaining a true ministry ; for if at such a time they had the power of ordaining separate from the people, they would take care none should be ordained but such as were like themselves, whereby a faithful ministry would be always prevented. Therefore even in the days of the *Old Testament*, God raised up Pastors after his own heart, who went with a *Thus saith the Lord*, among the people, without any leave at all from the appointed teachers and prophets.

As for the custom of laying on of hands, it is not in the *New Testament* exprefsly instituted, but is a ceremony used in Scripture on divers occasions. In the *Old Testament* it was done by command, *Levit. xxiv.*

14. when the man that had cursed was to be stoned, all that heard him, laid their hands on him.

Again, when any one offered a burnt-offering, he was to put his hand on it, *Levit. i. 4.* When the whole assembly of the children of *Israel* offer'd the *Le-*
vites

vites unto the Lord to execute his service, they were to lay their hands on them, *Numb.* viii. 10, 11. And the laying on of hands was used in the *New Testament*, when the Apostles, upon choice, and in behalf and presence of the Churches, appointed the Elders in their offices, *Acts* vi. 5, 6. *Acts* xiii. 1, 2, 3. *1 Tim.* v. 12. When any were to be endued with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, *Acts* viii. 17. *Acts* xix. 1, 6. *1 Tim.* iv. 14. *1 Tim.* i. 6. When they healed the sick, *Acts* xxviii. 8.

Of the SACRAMENTS.

GOD hath been pleased, not only to give us his Word, concerning our free salvation, but also from time to time hath annex'd thereunto certain mystical signs, as a seal to the things he has spoken: The giving of which signs he hath been pleased to call, The establishing his covenant with us, *Gen.* ix. 9, 11. xvii. 7. And the signs themselves he has called, The token of the Covenant which he makes between him and us, *Gen.* ix. And when this sign hath consisted in some holy rite or sacred action, commanded to be perform'd by us, it is call'd the Covenant, which we shall keep, *Gen.* xvii. 9, 11. serving as a memorial betwixt him and us, and a means of putting us in mind that he remembers his covenant, *Gen.* ix. 15, 16.

This sign was in *Noah's* days a rainbow; in *Abraham's*, circumcision; and in our days, baptism, or washing in water; administred in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, *Matt.* xxviii. 19.

Circumcision was figurative, or significant of the death of Christ, which was to come; shewing forth, that as one member of the body being circumcised, the whole body was accounted clean; so should one member of the mystical body, the Church, be circumcised or sacrificed, bearing the sins of the whole, and putting them away by his blood-shedding, whereby the whole body should become perfectly clean and holy, without spot,

spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, *Col. ii. 11. i. 22. Eph. v. 27.*

To this sacrament of circumcision, when the children of *Israel* were in *Egypt*, was instituted another, called the passover, wherein they were to remember their great deliverance, by eating of a lamb, and it is also pointed out to them the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

Baptism is significant of our being wash'd from our sins in Christ's blood, *Rev. i. 5.* of our being dead and buried, and rising again with him, *Rom. vi. 4. Col. ii. 12.* And a seal of that covenant, that our sins and our iniquities he will remember no more, *Heb. viii. 12.*

To which is also added the Lord's supper, wherein, by eating bread and drinking wine, significant of the Lord's body and blood, we remember him, and shew forth his death till he come, *1 Cor. xi. 23.*

With regard to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, it is needful to observe, that, as the word of God can receive no alteration from man's belief, or unbelief, but is and remains the faithful and true sayings of God, Words that are spirit and life, whether we believe them or no; so also it is with the sacraments, they can receive in themselves no alteration from the subjects concern'd with them, therefore they that eat and drink the Lord's supper unworthily, or without faith, eat and drink judgment to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body, which is sacramentally present, whether they discern it or no. If an unworthy receiver or administrator, hinder'd the ordinance from being truly so, they could not be guilty of a profanation of that ordinance, because they prevent it from becoming an ordinance: But it is impossible for God's words and ordinances to be destroyed thro' our unbelief. On the other side, it is useful to consider, that tho' faith makes no alteration in these things, yet they are not profitable to us without it, and therefore the work of the Holy Ghost, is to take of the things of Christ as they are, and shew them to us, or give us spiritually to discern them; that so faith being begotten, or strengthened, thereby they may become profitable.

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As to the particular circumstances that attend the ordinances, I would observe, that those that make the scripture their standard or rule, should be express only in those things that the scripture are express in; and should leave liberty of conscience, where that leaves liberty; and should make no unalterable rules or orders, where the scriptures are silent; the scripture examples are best for imitation, but to turn them into unalterable laws, is acting beyond scripture authority.

This being premised, I would deliver my own sentiments concerning baptism of infants, which, tho' I approve of, yet by no means so as to confine others to the same practice; neither do I think those right who make one way or other a bar to Church communion, seeing that the essence of baptism consists not in the subjects concern'd, but in being baptiz'd in water, signifying a washing in the blood of Christ, or being bury'd into his death, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. So that the baptism of believers, and the baptism of infants, is but one and the same baptism, tho' differently administred; and the difference of the administration, can never alter the ordinance itself; — my reasons for infant baptism, are as follow,

I. Infants do belong to the covenant of grace, and the promise is to them, and therefore the seal.

1 *Obj.* Suppose you should administer it to those who don't belong to the covenant of grace.

Ans. It can be attended with no worse consequences than administering the word to such; and we are commanded to preach the gospel to every creature, it being no more till faith comes, than the gospel preach'd by a sign.

2. *Obj.* Why then don't you also administer the Lord's supper to them.

Ans. Because it is an ordinance, in which we are not merely passive, as we are in baptism, but in which we are at that present instant, to commemorate his death, and feed by faith on his body and blood, which infants are not capable of, tho' they are capable of a passive ordinance, such as baptism is.

II. Baptism signifies our being wash'd in the blood of Christ passively, without condition, and also seals the unconditional promise, that our sins and iniquities he will remember no more, and therefore may be administered without condition to infants.

3. *Obj.* What means then these words, If thou believest with all thine heart, &c.

Ans. Because it would be mockery in adult persons to receive the sign, without faith in the thing signified; and therefore a confession of faith is necessary in them first, they being subjects capable thereof; but faith is not necessary as a condition, giving a proper right to baptism, no more than it is a condition of the thing signified by baptism, *viz.* the blood of Christ; and therefore, as infants may have the end of baptism, the righteousness it signifies and seals, they may also have the seal.

III. Circumcision, whatever it might signify and seal with respect to temporal blessings, &c. to the natural seed, yet it was also a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith of Christ's death and the remission of sins, and in this sense baptism is come in the stead thereof, as signifying and sealing the same thing; and the subjects capable of circumcision, are subjects capable of baptism, and therefore infants are so, and it is of as much use to them now, as circumcision was to the infants then.

IV. There is more ground for infant baptism from that text, *Mat. xix. 14.* then what is commonly observed; for in the first place, the parents were not commanded to bring their children, but they brought them in the faith of his goodness and power.

Again, the disciples had as much reason to find fault, as any have now.

The baptism of remission of sins in Jesu's blood was not as yet instituted, which is a very good reason for his not baptizing them; but his taking them in his arms, and blessing them, give us ground to think they may be baptized, for Christ's blessings are covenant blessings.

V. Some think the baptism of infants was not in use from the beginning, but is an innovation in the Church;

Church ; but I am inclin'd to think the contrary, for this reason, that if the baptism of infants had not been a practice from the beginning, it is probable there would have been some stir at its commencement and introduction ; but *Austin*, who is reported to be one of the first that defended it, speaks of it as " a practice the Church had, that was never instituted in councils, but always retain'd ; and therefore most rightly believed to have been delivered by no other than apostolick authority ;" *Aug. con. Don. lib. 4. ch. 24.* and the reason of its not being made mention of in writing, before *Austin's* time, is likely, because it was never questioned before.

F I N I S.



